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1807-1907



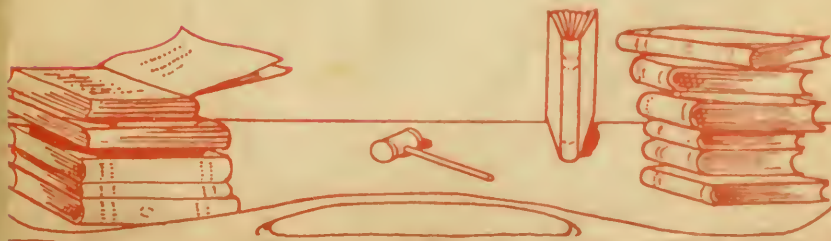
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1807

1907

A CENTURY OF BOOK AUCTIONS

Being a Brief Record
of the firm of
HODGSON & CO.





ONE HUNDRED YEARS
OF
BOOK AUCTIONS





EDMUND HODGSON

ONE HUNDRED YEARS
OF
BOOK AUCTIONS

1807—1907



BEING A BRIEF RECORD
OF THE FIRM OF
HODGSON AND CO.

(COMMONLY KNOWN AS "HODGSONS")

LONDON: PRINTED AT THE CHISWICK PRESS
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1907

SUCCESSION OF THE FIRM

MR. ROBERT SAUNDERS	1807 to 1825
MESSRS. SAUNDERS AND HODGSON . .	1825 to 1828
MR. EDMUND HODGSON	1828 to 1867
MESSRS. B. B. AND H. H. HODGSON .	1867 to 1871
MR. H. H. HODGSON (under the style of H. H. HODGSON AND Co.) . . .	1871 to 1900
MESSRS. J. E. AND S. HODGSON (under the style of HODGSON AND Co.) . .	Jan. 1901

SALE ROOMS

14, Old Compton Street	1807 to 1808
39, Fleet Street	1808 to 1829
192, Fleet Street	1829 to 1854
2, Chancery Lane	1854 to 1863
115, Chancery Lane	1863

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF BOOK AUCTIONS

1807-1907



ONE hundred years! Only a brief period it is true, as time is accounted in history, and yet one which marking the age or commemorating the foundation of a business firm, is worthy of note. It is, moreover, a period in the world of Book-collecting and Bookselling significant of great changes and many developments. How strange have been the vicissitudes in book-prices, how varied and oftentimes how rapid the changes which have taken place since 1807! On the one hand what treasures remained unknown and even uncared for one hundred years ago, whilst

on the other, how many books which were then greatly esteemed and eagerly acquired, have since faded into a past of complete indifference or neglect! How many precious volumes that to-day the wealthy bibliophile alone may hope to acquire, might then have been purchased at modest sums; whilst others, which have since taken their place in the highest realms of English Literature, had not yet been given to the world! Sheridan, Madame D'Arblay, Blake, Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Landor, Lamb, De Quincey, and Jane Austen—to mention only the more famous authors living in 1807—had but recently produced, or indeed were actually writing, those works which were to earn for them immortal fame. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Carlyle, Macaulay, and Borrow were then in early youth or childhood, while the great Victorian writers—Fitzgerald, Tennyson, Browning, Ruskin, Thackeray, Dickens, and the Brontës—were not yet born. In the world of Art and Book-Illustration, Bartolozzi, Rowlandson, Gillray, Turner, Stothard, and Smirke were producing those illustrations which have never since ceased to interest or to charm, and some of which are now valued by the collector at many

times the prices obtaining in 1807; whilst George Cruikshank, who was born in 1792 and whose works have attained such a wide vogue amongst collectors, had not yet begun his great career as artist and caricaturist.

In the sphere of bibliography—and it may be mentioned in passing, that in 1807 the word “bibliography” was not known in its present sense—the great Dibdin had hardly commenced the publication of those elaborate bibliographical works which, though often inaccurate, contain so much curious and amusing information about “books and printers, book-collectors and sales by auction.” The second edition of “*Bibliomania*,” which appeared in 1811, had no small share in exciting that interest in rare books and early editions, which appeared to reach a climax at the famous Roxburghe sale in 1812, but which, if prices are any criterion, is still growing in intensity. One saying alone of Dr. Dibdin’s, amply suffices to show the distance we have travelled with regard to prices since he lived. Referring in 1812 to the sum of £121 16s. paid for a copy of the First Folio Shakespeare, he said it was “the highest price ever given, or likely to be given for the book”—yet, only recently,

£3,600 has been paid for this most famous book, and he would be a bold man who would say, even now, that the highest limit has been reached. That this interest in the early editions of famous and rare books centred largely round the auction sales, was shown indeed by the fact that Dibdin, in his second and much enlarged edition, added a new chapter on "The Auction Room." By this addition he resolves, as explained in the preface, to gratify a certain "Book-Auction-Loving Bibliomaniac" and similar collectors, whose approbation also he hopes to gain, by the motto prefixed to the chapter in question from Clavell's "Catalogue of Books for 1680"—a catalogue of no small interest in the early history of book-auctions. Robert Watt had hardly commenced in 1807 his great "Bibliotheca Britannica," which despite untiring industry was not completed until after his death; while Lowndes was not to publish the original edition of his "Bibliographer's Manual"—a work which has the oft-forgotten merit of being the first systematic bibliography of the kind in England—until nearly thirty years later.

It is to the year 1807 that the firm whose history is briefly recorded in these pages traces its

origin. The earliest catalogue now in their possession is that of the sale of a library—duly announced in the “Reading Mercury” of 7th September—held at Reading by the founder, Mr. Robert Saunders, on 9th September and two following days. It is perhaps significant that whereas this sale of a “Most Valuable and Select Library of Books, the principal part of which are in superb Bindings, and forming in the whole, one of the most choice and elegant Collections ever submitted to Public Sale,” took place at the “Upper Ship Inn,” Duke Street, Reading, it is specifically stated on the next catalogue (dated 23rd September of the same year) that this latter collection has been “Transmitted to town for sale.” Moreover, almost every subsequent sale was held in London, a fact which seems clearly to point to the conclusion that London—which is still the greatest book-market in the world—was at once recognized as the best centre for sales. The second sale was held at the rooms of Mr. Saunders at 14, Old Compton Street, Soho, where the business was continued until May, 1808, and where, as it is stated on the catalogues, “everything connected with Literature will find a ready and advan-

tageous sale." Occasionally, however, the sales were effected either at "Tom's Coffee House" in Cornhill—a famous tavern which was frequently used for auctions, and which had become a rendezvous for merchants during the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries—or at the "London Tavern." It was here that the third auction was held on 1st October and two following days, and it is interesting to observe that the advertisement of this sale which appeared in "The Times" for 30th September, was the first of many hundreds of the firm's announcements which have since appeared, and still continue to appear, in that paper.

In May, 1808, the firm moved to premises at No. 39, Fleet Street, almost immediately opposite the old church of St. Dunstan. This situation was recalled by W. H. Ireland in his scurrilous poem, "Chalcographimania" (published in 1814), where, in the second book, descriptive of an imaginary tour through the well-known auction rooms of the day, he refers to Mr. Robert Saunders:

Last worthy to be rank'd the friend
Of *Catalogus*, I'll unbend



115, CHANCERY LANE.
Forwarding a consignment for Canada and the States.

My Muse, that from Pall Mall meanders,
To halt at Auction-room of *S—nd—ers*;
Whose heavy head leaves in the lurch,
His neighbours of St. Dunstan's Church;
I mean the wooden brace that tell,
The fleeting hours by striking bell.

—the reference in the last three lines being to the two great clockwork figures, which struck the hours on the bells placed above the overhanging clock, and which were objects of much interest up to the time of their removal in 1830. No. 39 had long been known under the name of “The Poets’ Gallery,” and was a house with many interesting associations. On this site formerly stood the “Mitre Tavern,” which is said to have dated back to Shakespeare’s day, and of which mention is made by Pepys in the early pages of his famous Diary, on the occasion of a visit in January, 1659. It is unnecessary to recall the many meetings which took place here in later times between Dr. Johnson and Boswell, and other celebrities of their day—doubtless amongst them David Garrick, whose library was destined to be sold here in 1823. Boswell himself records that the “Mitre Tavern” was a favourite resort of Dr. Johnson, “where he loved to sit up late,” while the great biographer himself, sometimes in

company with Goldsmith, enjoyed the conversation of his still greater hero—conversations in which Goldsmith “endeavoured with too much eagerness to *shine*,” and which have been preserved by Boswell with such unique and inimitable skill. The “Mitre Tavern” having been used by the Society of Antiquaries up to 1753 (when they removed to a house of their own in Chancery Lane) ceased to exist in 1788, and the name of “The Poets’ Gallery” had been given to it by Thomas Macklin, the publisher, well known for his magnificent edition of the Bible. The first sale of importance held at these premises was the library of John MacDiarmid, author of the “Lives of British Statesmen,” offered on 4th June and six following days, and in the years following many interesting and important sales of the libraries of eminent men were conducted here, several of them extending to as many as sixteen days’ sale. A few prices gleaned from a sale in 1818, show that the amounts realized for fine books in these early years of the nineteenth century, were considerably higher than is sometimes thought. For instance, a copy of Granger’s “Biographical History of England,” in 16 volumes, realized

520 guineas; Pennant's "Account of London," in 7 vols., 125 guineas; Macklin's Bible, 7 vols., 70 guineas; Daniell's "Oriental Scenery," 100 guineas; Bowyer's edition of Hume's "England," in 10 vols., £168; Boydell's Shakespeare, 11 vols., 110 guineas; while a collection of Chinese drawings realized as much as 500 guineas. But of all these sales, one, of the highest interest, overshadows the others. This was the sale of "the Library, Splendid Books of Prints, and Poetical and Historical Works, of David Garrick, lately removed from his villa at Hampton and house on the Adelphi Terrace." The sale commenced on Wednesday, 23rd April, 1823, and was continued during the nine following days. Perhaps the most interesting lot in the catalogue—which, it may be added, is now difficult to obtain—was a copy of Hogarth's works, which realized just over £100, and respecting which a note (added to the catalogue description) states, that "from the intimacy which existed between Garrick and Hogarth this is, as may be naturally expected, a very superior copy." In connection with this sale it may be mentioned incidentally, that a few of the books from the library were again sold by the firm

in February, 1902, when, amongst others, the copy of Paul Hentzner's "Journey into England," presented to the great actor by Horace Walpole (by whom the book was printed at his private press at Strawberry Hill), realized £9 10s. as against £2 3s. in the original sale. There were, of course, other notable features in the catalogue which cannot however be remarked on here; indeed, the sale was one of the chief events of the year, and the fine library—the collection of early quarto plays from which had been previously presented by Garrick to the British Museum—was worthy of the famous owner.

The sales continued to be held at No. 39, Fleet Street, until Lady Day 1829, when this interesting old building passed into the hands of Messrs. Hoare, the bankers, who had been established in the adjoining house for several generations, and who now pulled the building down to extend their own premises. The new rooms, which still retained the name of "The Poets' Gallery," were situated at 192, Fleet Street, at the east corner of Chancery Lane, a site which also has its literary and historic associations, for it is said that the father of



THE AUCTION ROOM.

The Rostrum in the centre of the picture was formerly used at the rooms in Fleet Street.

Abraham Cowley, the poet, kept a grocer's shop here; whilst the opposite corner is memorable as having been the site of a house occupied for many years by Izaak Walton. A few months before moving, the entire control had passed into the hands of Mr. Edmund Hodgson, who for some years previously had been associated with Mr. Saunders. He developed the business—which he continued to direct for nearly forty years—in many ways, and raised it to a high standard of prosperity. In particular, he developed a large connection with the publishing trade, and for nearly the whole time he was in business he conducted, with few exceptions, the chief Trade-Sales. In this connection his most famous transaction was the sale at the "London Coffee House" (which, in common with the "Albion Tavern," was frequently used for such purposes) of the entire copyrights and stock of the novels and poems of Sir Walter Scott, together with the *Life* by Lockhart, an event which is said to have brought together the largest trade gathering that has ever been witnessed. It is not necessary here to make further reference to the practice of Trade-Sales, of which many hundreds were held, but which practically ceased to exist

some twenty years ago. The catalogues of these sales (still in the possession of the firm), constitute, however, a most interesting chapter in the history of bookselling in England. Correctly speaking, they were not public sales—that is to say, they were usually held at the “Albion Tavern” (a landmark which has only recently disappeared), and were attended, on invitation, by the Trade. Moreover, the books were offered at reduced or “liberal” prices, rather than sold by auction.

In December, 1854, the firm removed for the fourth time, to No. 2, Chancery Lane, into rooms which were immediately adjoining the old premises, and which were specially built for the purpose. The first sale held here was the stock of the splendid productions of the well-known architect, Mr. Owen Jones, including a large number of copies of his elaborate work on the Alhambra. It is impossible in any way to enumerate the many important sales of copyrights and publishers’ stocks—sales which frequently produced many thousands of pounds—which took place on these premises. At the same time, many extensive libraries of distinguished book collectors, as well as those of

eminent men of learning and science, were also dispersed here. Probably the most important was the library of the College of Advocates, Doctors' Commons, which, commencing on 22nd April, 1861, continued during the seven following days, 2,456 lots being sold under the hammer. From a legal point of view this library was, perhaps, the most remarkable that had ever been offered for sale. It included an unusually extensive collection of the works of celebrated English and foreign writers on civil, canon, and ecclesiastical law from the earliest time, as well as many manuscripts of great interest. It may here be added that both before and since this great sale, the firm enjoyed practically a monopoly in the sale of law books by auction, and the professional libraries of many eminent chief justices, judges, and lawyers, have been sold at their rooms. It is curious to remark that solicitors, whose libraries were sold anonymously, were invariably described in the old catalogues as "respectable"—a practice which was discontinued after about 1852, when the epithet "eminent" was generally adopted.

In June, 1863, the firm again removed, this time to the premises they now occupy at 115,

Chancery Lane, which were also specially built for their business as book auctioneers. Advantage was taken of this move to issue a circular, in which it was pointed out "to gentlemen who, as executors or having libraries of their own for disposal, as well as the public in general, desire to find the most satisfactory mode of sale," that "public sale by auction in London is, without exception, the best means of realizing such property." Others who had not tried this plan of disposing of books, were assured "that every attention is paid in its arrangement to the best mode of introducing the property to the public, as well as of securing a full realization of the same." In 1867 Mr. Edmund Hodgson, who took a leading part in the foundation of the Booksellers' Provident Institution in 1839, and who twice served the office of Master of the Worshipful Company of Stationers in 1866-7, retired in favour of his sons, Messrs. B. B. and H. H. Hodgson, who had been associated with him for some years. A few years later, on the retirement of Mr. Barnard Hodgson in 1871, Mr. Henry Hill Hodgson assumed the entire management of the business, and continued in that capacity up to 1900. By a fortuitous coincidence,



CATALOGUING A VALUABLE MODERN LIBRARY.

The books in the foreground comprise a complete set of the Kelmscott Press Publications.

Mr. H. H. Hodgson has himself in the present year attained to the office of Master of the Stationers' Company—a Guild which forms a strong link with the history of printing and bookselling in London for the past four hundred years, and the interest of which is at once brought to mind, by a mere recital of the names of past Masters. Reginald Wolfe, Richard Tottell, John Day, Christopher and Robert Barker, John Smethwicke, Samuel Mearne, Robert Clavell, Samuel Richardson, Jacob Tonson, John Boydell, Thomas Cadell, John Walter, and J. B. Nicholls, are only a few out of the total of two hundred and forty-five famous printers, stationers, or booksellers who have held this ancient office since the incorporation of the Company in 1556, but their names suffice to recall its historic interest.

On retirement from active participation in the work of the firm in 1900, Mr. H. H. Hodgson was in turn succeeded by his two sons, Mr. John Edmund and Mr. Sidney Hodgson, who had joined the firm some years previously, having first acquired practical knowledge and experience of the bookselling trade, the former with Messrs. Bickers and Son, of Leicester Square, and the

latter with Mr. David Nutt, the foreign book seller and publisher, formerly of the Strand.

Mention has previously been made of the fact that from about 1840 to 1890 the firm was largely concerned in the sale of publishers' stocks and plant, copyrights and remainders. During more recent years, however, the trade in this direction has become, for one reason or another, diverted into other channels, and therefore Messrs. Hodgson now chiefly specialize in dealing with libraries of rare, valuable, or standard books.

Looking back over the history of the firm during the past hundred years, it may be added that they have conducted up to the present time nearly 4,200 sales, varying in each year, from 10 in 1807, to between 40 and 50 in recent years, each sale extending on an average to three days. The file of catalogues of all these sales, priced practically throughout, and complete with the exception of a single year, forms the most interesting feature in the archives of the firm, while the names of the buyers are recorded in a series of sale-books dating back nearly eighty years.

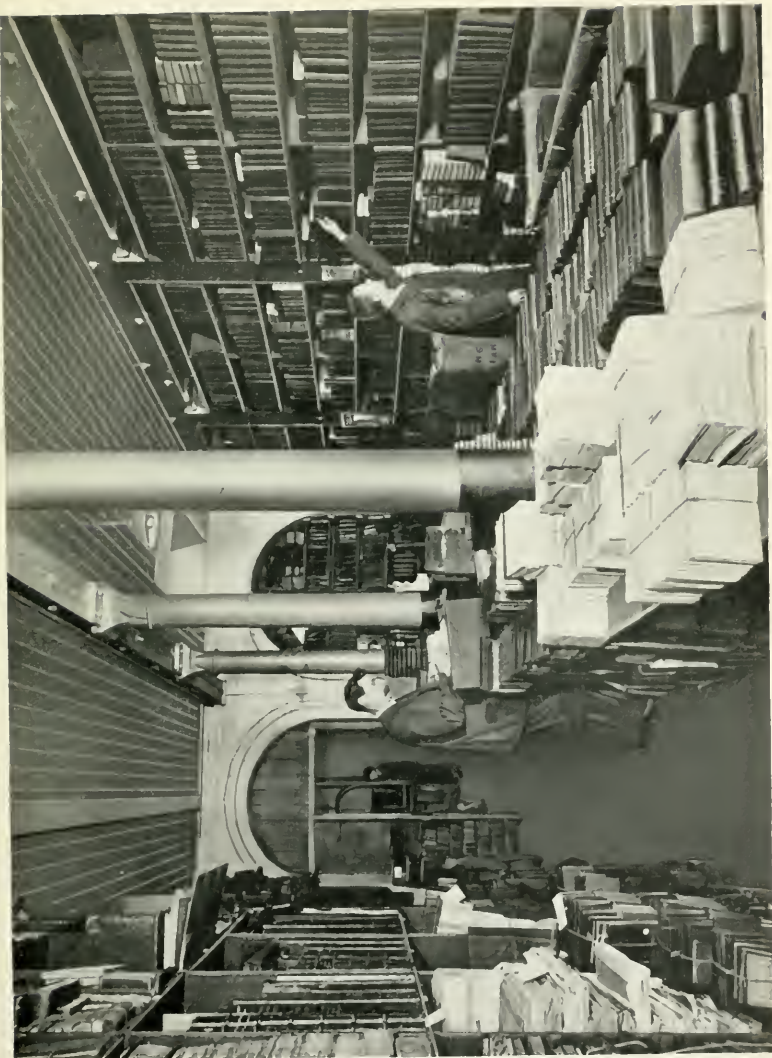
In the early days the catalogues were apparently compiled with but one object in view, viz., a description of the utmost brevity. "Vicar of

Wakefield, 2 vols. in 1," "Burns' Poems," "Dampier's Voyages, maps, rare," are a few examples (taken at random from catalogues of 1807), of descriptions which, though admirably brief, would be regarded in these days as quite inadequate. The task of the cataloguer was still further simplified by the fact that every book was lotted separately, so that he was happily saved from the necessity of exercising any judgment in that direction! Indeed, the binding or the plates seem to be the only two features which ever called for comment—"Macklin's Bible, 6 vols., most superbly bound" (£38), "Gay's Fables, splendid edition, with fine plates," or "Citizen of the World, 2 vols., calf double extra."

The conditions of sale were practically the same in 1807 as now; indeed, they may be said to be identical with those originally adopted by the earliest English book auctioneers at the end of the seventeenth century. It is, however, interesting to note, that although the printed conditions of the first sale by Mr. Saunders state that the books "will be sold with all faults," a manuscript note is appended to the effect that the auctioneer further undertakes "that, if upon

Collating at the place of sale any of the old and of the new Books prove defective I will make good the imperfections or return the money." For the first few years in the firm's history, the sales usually took place either at half-past five in the evening or at eleven o'clock in the morning, whereas one o'clock is now the invariable rule, while, in accordance perhaps with the more leisurely methods of the period, not more than about 150 lots were offered on each occasion in the earlier catalogues—a number which has increased latterly to an average of 330—though the sales seldom occupy more than two hours and a half. The number of buyers at each sale has likewise also largely increased, for whereas in the old days those who attended were confined chiefly to residents in or about town, at the present time the actual buyers—averaging nearly 100 at each sale—are representative of book-buyers and collectors throughout the United Kingdom, as well as the more important book-selling centres on the Continent and in the United States, not to mention the occasional visits of buyers from Canada, India, Australia, and South Africa.

In conclusion, the present members of the



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The books in the archway are some of the Bibliographical and Reference Works used by the Cataloguers.

firm take this opportunity of expressing the hope that, with the aid of their efficient staff—whose services, it is pleasing to record, show an average length of eleven years—they may maintain and uphold the honourable traditions of the past hundred years.





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